

***Congressional Delegation and Gov. Paterson Visit NY Troops During the Holidays***



After visiting with members of the armed forces in Iraq, Governor Paterson and U.S. Representatives Steve Israel (D-NY) and Anthony Weiner (D-NY) toured Afghanistan Tuesday as they completed their visit with American troops stationed in both countries.

In Afghanistan, the delegation met with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and nearly 200 New York troops. Governor Paterson awarded Purple Hearts and Bronze Stars to several service members.

While in Iraq, the delegation met with service members, senior military officials, and public officials, including General Raymond T. Odierno, the commander of the Multi-National Force—Iraq (MNF-I), and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. The bipartisan delegation, which also included Representatives Tom Cole (R-OK), and Ed Whitfield (R-KY), also toured various military facilities and shared meals with soldiers.

After landing in Iraq on Sunday, the delegation first met with the Marine unit in Al Anbar province commanded by Major General Kelly. The delegation had lunch in Al Anbar with soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, before meeting with Lieutenant General Frank Helmick, the commander of MNSTC-I (Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq), who discussed training and developing Iraqi security forces.

The delegation also met with Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin who commands Multi National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) and ate dinner with New Yorkers from an Army National Guard Aviation Battalion. Many of those troops were on their second or third tours.

“I’m proud of the accomplishments these brave men and women have made while serving in Iraq under the toughest conditions imaginable,” said Governor Paterson. “It is due to their extraordinary efforts that progress has been made in reducing violence over the last year and now we’re closer to being able to bring our troops home.”

“Much will be asked of our nation’s service men and women and members of New York’s National Guard and Reserves to put Iraq and Afghanistan on a path toward peace and stability,” Governor Paterson added. “We have come away with a better understanding of what we can do to ensure they have all they need before they deploy and are given the care and benefits they deserve when they return.”

U.S. Representative Steve Israel, member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, who has now completed his third visit to Iraq and Afghanistan, said: “I’m honored to have visited Afghanistan with Governor Paterson and Congressman Weiner to meet with our New York service members and see the central front in the war against al Qaeda. This is where the attacks against New York originated; this is where Osama bin Laden fought and fled; and this is where our focus should be to defeat the terrorists who would do us harm again.”

A conference call with reporters will be scheduled with Governor Paterson and Representatives Israel and Weiner for Tuesday afternoon.